

Review of Voluntary Sector Organisations
(Community Learning and Development)

**Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure
in Scotland (BEMIS)**

18 December 2007

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Context and background	1
3. Key strengths	2
4. How well did BEMIS meet the needs of its stakeholders?	2
5. How effective was BEMIS in key aspects of management?	3
6. How effective was the leadership of BEMIS?	5
7. What is BEMIS capacity to improve?	5
8. What happens next?	5
Appendix 1: Quality indicators used to evaluate BEMIS	7

1. Introduction

In July 2007, the Scottish Government (SG) commissioned HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) to undertake a review of Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS). HMIE and SG agreed the quality and performance indicators to be used in the review from the framework of indicators within the HMIE publication *How Good Is Our Community Learning and Development?2 (HGIOCLD?2)*.

The fieldwork for the review took place between 18 and 20 September 2007. Visits to two local projects within Glasgow were undertaken to talk to stakeholders and participants. A series of interviews and focus groups were conducted with members of the BEMIS Board, managers and staff. Telephone interviews with stakeholders were also carried out. Questionnaires were distributed to key stakeholders across Scotland. Questionnaires were returned from 32 respondents. BEMIS provided a detailed self-evaluation in advance of the review, together with comprehensive supporting documentary evidence.

The cooperation of board members, managers, staff and stakeholders is gratefully acknowledged.

2. Context and background

BEMIS is the national black and ethnic minorities led umbrella body supporting the development of the black and ethnic minorities voluntary sector in Scotland. Based in Glasgow it is a Company Limited by Guarantee and a registered Scottish Charity. BEMIS was established in 2002 to promote the interest of minority ethnic voluntary organisations, develop capacity and support inclusion and integration of minority ethnic communities. It is a member-led and managed organisation with an elected board of directors. Responsibility for strategic management lies with the Chief Executive. A national development officer is responsible for operational management and developments, supported by two full-time development officers and an office manager. A part-time development officer operates from a base in Inverness.

The major aims and objectives of BEMIS are to represent and support the development of the minority ethnic voluntary sector across Scotland, and, to support the diverse communities and individuals that this sector represents, especially those who are under-represented and disadvantaged. BEMIS aims to address inequalities by empowering communities, working towards an inclusive society by establishing structures which recognise diversity and empowers black and ethnic minorities. BEMIS works to ensure that the diverse black and ethnic minorities voluntary sector and the communities that this sector represents are fully recognised and supported as a valued part of civic society and a multicultural Scotland.

Key aims and objectives:

- To strengthen the capacity of the minority ethnic voluntary sector.
- Raise the profile of the minority ethnic voluntary sector and its needs at strategic, local and national levels.

- Have a coordinating role for the voice of the minority ethnic voluntary sector, ensuring pertinent issues are raised with the relevant bodies.
- To take a lead on policy issues and debate which are of concern to minority ethnic communities at both local and national levels.
- Work in partnership with all stakeholders and the diverse black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in support of equality and a multicultural Scotland.

3. Key strengths

The review of BEMIS identified the following key strengths:

- a highly committed board of directors who brought with them a good range of professional skills and a clear understanding of their responsibilities;
- staff and managers were highly committed and motivated;
- the organisation had been successful in uniting a diverse range of stakeholders;
- BEMIS was highly valued by stakeholders and was making a positive impact on individuals, organisations and communities;
- strong commitment to inclusion and diversity; and
- strong commitment to ensuring grass roots organisations have a voice rather than acting as a spokesperson for BME communities.

4. How well did BEMIS meet the needs of its stakeholders?

How well did BEMIS impact on communities?

BEMIS made a significant difference in local communities and to the organisations it supported. Ninety three point six percent of questionnaire respondents rated the overall service provided by BEMIS as good to excellent. Targets set within the BEMIS work plan 2006-2008 with regard to increasing the database of organisations had been exceeded. The BEMIS network and database had increased involvement with stakeholder organisations actively using the database as a networking tool to communicate their work nationally. Active involvement in research work with other organisations such as Volunteer Development Scotland enhanced understanding and removed barriers to BME involvement in local and national democracy.

The comprehensive range of accredited training opportunities offered including a *BA in community regeneration* and *HNC working with communities* ensured BME people in local communities had the skills to better engage with local structures and partnerships. Targets set for uptake on the comprehensive range of professional training courses facilitated by BEMIS had been met with good retention of students and pass rates. Organisational efficiency and

effectiveness for stakeholder organisations had been improved. Students were applying analytical and research skills, and their increased level of understanding of issues, within their own organisation which was resulting in positive outcomes. BEMIS had effectively supported the establishment of bodies such as Iranian–Scottish association including the establishment of a constitution and fund-raising training. As an indication of their satisfaction the association had nominated a representative to join the BEMIS board and so support other organisations.

BEMIS had been instrumental in securing a significant increase in the BME responses to consultation processes making effective use of its network both nationally and across a diverse range of ethnic communities. Consultation roadshows around BME concerns across Scotland had been facilitated for Scottish Ministers. In partnership with others BEMIS facilitated the first major conference for young Muslims from across Scotland in July 2007 with over 300 participants. BEMIS was instrumental in securing over 190 responses from BME young people to the national youth work strategy consultation. These views would not have been heard otherwise. BEMIS was making a positive contribution to policy development and had been instrumental in ensuring the race equality review undertaken by the then Scottish Executive engaged directly with BME organisations. It had also effectively contributed to consultations such as the Strathclyde Police race equality and community engagement strategy. The fund-raising training programme offered substantial benefits to organisations whilst developing community capacity. Organisations had successfully applied what they had learned increasing their funding as a result. As a condition of the fundraising training the *AMINA Muslim Women Resource Centre* had organised cascade training for other local organisations with nine organisations and 19 participants in attendance. This was a good example of capacity building.

How well did BEMIS impact on its voluntary and paid staff?

Managers and staff at BEMIS were highly motivated, energetic and committed to the purpose of their work. They worked very effectively as a team, providing high levels of mutual support. Staff participated in an annual staff planning day informed by the outcomes of the board's strategic annual away day. Staff were well supported and felt valued. Staff were able to raise issues directly with board members who were highly visible and with whom there was regular informal contact. A recent issue raised by the staff regarding sickness and redundancy payment had been effectively and swiftly addressed by the Board. A structured six-monthly staff appraisal system was in place which included the identification of training needs. Training requests were assessed on relevance to individual work remit. All staff had benefited from attendance at training and conferences. One member of staff had recently successfully completed the postgraduate diploma in equalities. However, the frequency of one-to-one support and supervision sessions varied with no systematic approach to recording outcomes.

5. How effective was BEMIS in key aspects of management?

Inclusion, equality and fairness

The very strong commitment of BEMIS to diversity and inclusion was reflected in its diverse membership. Participants in the professional development courses came from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Participants in the *HNC working in communities* course included:

Chinese, Indian, Afro Caribbean, African, Pakistani, and Iranian. One Chinese student had translated a letter for a local health worker in Glasgow inviting members of the incoming Chinese community to a meeting. This had resulted in a large attendance with further engagement work planned. Programmes effectively targeted minority groups across Scotland. In addition to working with existing BME communities BEMIS was actively engaged in identifying and targeting new groups such as migrant workers and gypsy travellers. They were also at the early stages of engaging with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people within the Muslim community. In addition to providing childcare support BEMIS offered financial support to students to overcome financial barriers to participation. There was a strong commitment to developing rural inclusion through a part-time officer in Inverness and through development work in Dumfries and Galloway. The *HNC working in communities* was delivered in Glasgow, Fife and Inverness, and a further course was planned in Dumfries and Galloway. BEMIS had effectively supported the involvement of minority ethnic groups in the community planning process in more than one authority and established a multicultural association in Dumfries and Galloway. This included facilitating a one day seminar on race equality, discrimination and multiculturalism in rural areas held in November 2006.

However, the organisation did not have a full awareness with regard to its responsibilities in working with children and vulnerable adults. There was no criteria to check that affiliated organisations were operating within a child protection policy context. Development staff were not subject to disclosure checks.

Participation of service users and other stakeholders

BEMIS had a strong track record of consulting its target communities, identifying needs and responding quickly with programmes and projects. Their commitment to capacity building ensured that local projects were self sustaining and no longer required significant support from BEMIS staff. The organisation had made very good efforts to target specific communities with its work, and to involve them in its management. However, they recognised the need to both fill the remaining available places allowed on the Board and to further develop a diverse representation. This was required both in terms of the breadth of minority communities and the geography of Scotland. Through a joint project with the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, BEMIS communicated regularly with its stakeholders through the *MEMO and MEMO+* publications. These electronic bulletins provided relevant information to minority groups, and encouraged participation in consultations and external events. Until recently BEMIS had also produced a newsletter for member groups. The organisation was looking to launch an alternative journal, but member groups were currently missing the type of information that was contained in the newsletter. Overall, the organisation was not fully capitalising on its excellent work. It should develop better means to communicate and celebrate its successes so as to raise its profile and encourage increased participation and involvement from its target audience.

Operational planning

BEMIS used a variety of planning documents for different purposes. This included a business plan, a helpful *The Way Forward* document which was still in draft form and a summary work plan with detailed targets. Some staff completed a monthly action plan for individual work areas, and this was discussed with their line manager. However, there was no unified planning structure which demonstrated how each member of staff was contributing to the

overall strategic objectives of the organisation. Consequently, the organisation found it more difficult to prioritise work, manage large workloads and regularly monitor progress. Performance information was gathered and reported to various funders and the management committee, but this was not regular and systematic. BEMIS had completed a number of helpful evaluations of specific projects, but planning documents did not identify how anticipated outcomes would be measured making monitoring and evaluation more difficult. BEMIS was not able to systematically and rigorously record the impact it was making. Commendably, the organisation had arranged a strategic review day with the management committee to review the direction and priorities of BEMIS.

6. How effective was the leadership of BEMIS?

Board members of BEMIS were strong, active and challenging with a good range of professional expertise. Board members felt a strong sense of commitment to BEMIS and were clear about the important role the organisation was playing. The Convenor of the Board provided strong and clear leadership, supported effectively by the other office bearers. The Chief Executive was dedicated, committed and passionate about the work of BEMIS. All staff were enthusiastic and hard-working, with teamwork being an important feature. In recognition of the existing system for managing finance being time consuming and less secure, the introduction of a more effective electronic financial management system was being discussed. However, the important scrutiny role required by directors of a company limited by guarantee was being compromised by the lack of written financial and work reports to the Board. Although challenge and discussion was evident at board meetings, it was reactive and not founded on careful consideration of the available information. It was also important for BEMIS to continue to maintain key networks and partnerships so as to be fully aware of national and local developments outwith its particular area of focus.

7. What is the capacity for BEMIS to improve?

There is a strong commitment at both board and staff level to ensure that the diverse voluntary sector and communities this sector represents are fully recognised and supported as a valued part of civic society and a multicultural Scotland. BEMIS are in the process of introducing a new electronic financial management system which will assist the Board in undertaking their scrutiny role. However, there is a need to develop a more systematic planning framework which brings together all the key work elements.

Based on the action points within this report being effectively undertaken HMIE is confident that BEMIS has the capacity to improve the impact it makes on the BME communities in Scotland.

8. What happens next?

HMIE will take no further action in respect of this review and recommends that BEMIS take action on the main points for action below.

- Develop a unified approach to planning which clearly monitors and reports individual staff contributions against strategic objectives.

- Develop more effective monitoring and evaluation of impact.
- Improve marketing of BEMIS highlighting the benefits to stakeholders.
- Introduce regular written financial and work reports to the Board in support of their scrutiny role.

Stewart Maxwell
Managing Inspector
HMIE

Appendix 1: Quality indicators used to evaluate BEMIS

HM Inspectors use performance measures and quality indicators when making judgements in their reviews of national voluntary organisations. The quality indicators used were selected from those published in June 2006 in the publication *HGIOCLD?2*. This publication is available on the website www.hmie.gov.uk.

In the report and this appendix we make clear the judgements made by using these word scale categories:

Excellent	Outstanding, sector leading
Very good	Major strengths
Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
Adequate	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Weak	Important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

Improvement in performance	Very good
Impact on staff and volunteers	Very good
Impact on local communities	Excellent
Inclusion, equality and fairness	Very good
Participation of service users / stakeholders	Good
Operational planning	Adequate
Developing leadership and direction	Good

How can you contact us?

HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of community learning and development voluntary organisation reviews you should write in the first instance to Annette Bruton, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsso.org.uk.

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